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Canada's Churches Are Burning



With almost 100 Christian churches attacked, Trudeau has yet to dedicate a single speech to the crisis.

Jonathon Van Maren(<https://europeanconservative.com/articles/author/jonathon-van-maren/>)

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Five days before Christmas, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the small Albertan village of Beiseker burned to the ground. With a population of less than 1,000, Beiseker seemed an unlikely place for an arsonist to strike—but it was the fourth prairie church to burn in December 2023 alone. On the night of December 7, St. Mary Abbots Anglican church and St. Aidan’s Church went up in flames in Barrhead, with the arsonist apparently waiting for fire crews to arrive at St. Aidan’s before torching the second church; St. Gabriel Catholic Mission burned down on December 15 in the hamlet of Janvier (population, 140). The RCMP [claims](https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/four-alberta-churches-burned-in-the-weeks-before-christmas#:~:text=While%20Montreal's%20Notre%20Dame%20held,all%20under%20investigation%20by%20police) (<https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/four-alberta-churches-burned-in-the-weeks-before-christmas#:~:text=While%20Montreal's%20Notre%20Dame%20held,all%20under%20investigation%20by%20police>) that, thus far, there is no evidence of a “concerted effort” against churches.

Individual arsonists may be perpetrating crimes of opportunity rather than hatred, but the opportunity has been created by a hate-fuelled wave of church burnings across Canada. Since press reports of a mass grave at a former residential school for Indigenous children in British Columbia ([claims that were later debunked](https://thecritic.co.uk/issues/april-2023/canadas-grave-errors/) (<https://thecritic.co.uk/issues/april-2023/canadas-grave-errors/>)) in 2021, 96 churches have been burned down or vandalized. Some were still in use by parishioners; others were important heritage buildings; several were old First Nations places of worship located on reserves. The independent media outlet True North now [curates a map](https://tnc.news/2024/01/02/a-map-of-every-church-burnt-or-vandalized-since-the-residential-school-announcements3/) (<https://tnc.news/2024/01/02/a-map-of-every-church-burnt-or-vandalized-since-the-residential-school-announcements3/>) of all the churches that have been torched or attacked.

The response of Canadian progressives has been fuel for the fire. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau waited weeks to condemn the initial arsons, finally [calling them](https://torontosun.com/opinion/columnists/lilley-trudeau-explains-away-arson-attacks-on-churches) (<https://torontosun.com/opinion/columnists/lilley-trudeau-explains-away-arson-attacks-on-churches>) “unacceptable” but also “fully understandable, given the shameful history that we are all becoming more and more aware of.” When asked if the attacks were a hate crime, he demurred and stated that they were “a shame.” Harsha Walia, head of the B.C. Civil Liberties Association, was less circumspect, responding to the news by tweeting, “Burn it all down.” Trudeau’s longtime pal and former Principal Secretary Gerald Butts also called the arsons wrong but “understandable”—language that no progressive would use if mosques or temples were the targets.

If Muslim places of worship had been attacked the response would have been fierce. In fact, last January—after [over 60 churches](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2021_Canadian_church_burnings) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2021_Canadian_church_burnings) had already been attacked—Trudeau appointed Canada’s first Special Representative on Combatting Islamophobia, [stating](https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2023/01/26/prime-minister-announces-appointment-canadas-first-special) (<https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2023/01/26/prime-minister-announces-appointment-canadas-first-special>): “The Government of Canada stands with and supports Muslim communities across Canada and reaffirms its commitment to take action to denounce and tackle Islamophobia, hate-fuelled violence, and systemic discrimination whenever and wherever it occurs.” It is not that Canada’s progressives are incapable of moral clarity when religious groups are attacked; it is that they are deliberately selective in how and when they choose to apply it.

Trudeau opposes the arsonists’ methods, but he shares their worldview that Christianity has been a malevolent force in Canadian history. He has consistently condemned those who hold to Christian orthodoxy on abortion and LGBT ideology as unCanadian, often in fervent terms. Trudeau’s Canada is not the nation founded in

1867; it is the country transformed by the Sexual Revolution during the tenure of his father, Pierre Trudeau. His frequently expressed contempt for those who hold values that have been held by the vast majority of Canadians for the vast majority of Canadian history reflects his belief that Christianity—the founding faith of the nation he leads—must be rejected.

The rhetoric of Trudeau and other progressive leaders is particularly potent in the context of the near-total dechristianization of Canada. According to an Evangelical Fellowship of Canada poll, a mere 11% of Canadians attend *any* kind of religious service on a weekly basis. Those affiliated with evangelical churches dropped from 12% of the population in 1996 to 9% in 2016 to 6% in 2019. A third of Canadians now identify as having “no religion” at all, and the post-Christian “mainline Protestant” churches, most of which backed the Sexual Revolution, have almost entirely collapsed. Canadians now know little about Christianity—except for what they hear from their leaders and the press. Consequently, polling shows that an increasing number of Canadians (<https://globalnews.ca/news/8759564/canada-religion-society-perceptions/>) believe that Christianity is damaging for society. It’s not difficult to discern why.

In 2022, for example, the Trudeau government released a report (<https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/mnd-advisory-panel-systemic-racism-discrimination-final-report-jan-2022.html>), recommending (<https://europeanconservative.com/articles/commentary/de-christianizing-remembrance-day/>), that the Canadian Armed Forces cease hiring chaplains who “represent or are affiliated with organized religions whose beliefs are not synonymous with those of a diverse and inclusive workplace” as these faiths should be seen as “a source of suffering and intergenerational trauma” for many Canadians, with this being “especially true for many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and two-spirited members of Canadian society” (“two-spirit,” a term invented sometime in the 1990s that nobody can precisely define (<https://quillette.com/blog/2022/10/03/what-does-it-mean-to-be-two-spirited-no-one-seems-to-know/>), is used as an Indigenous descriptor of LGBT identity).

With almost 100 Christian churches attacked, Trudeau has yet to dedicate a single speech to the crisis. Judging by the lackadaisical responses of progressive politicians, one suspects that they see these fires as purgatorial. When the number of churches attacked was at 68, Trudeau appointed a Special Representative to combat Islamophobia; when the count was at 83, the Liberal and NDP Members of Parliament at the Indigenous and Northern Affairs Committee voted to adjourn (<https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/liberal-ndp-mps-shut-down-motion-to-condemn-church-burnings-across-canada/>) to avoid considering a motion put forward by a Conservative MP denouncing the destruction of churches. Perhaps when the arson count reaches 100, or 150, Trudeau might consider reestablishing Canada’s Office of Religious Freedom, which he disbanded in 2016 (<https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/canada-removes-religious-freedom-office/>) after deciding it was no longer necessary.

Jonathon Van Maren is a contributing editor to *The European Conservative*. He has written for *First Things*, *National Review*, *The American Conservative*, and His latest book is *Prairie Lion: The Life & Times of Ted Byfield*.

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